

PRWAD AND THE SEVENTIES

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I am happy to have the opportunity to greet the delegates at your Third Annual Convention even if this is literally a "flying visit." I hope that another year I will be able to spend more time with you, but I thought it important to attend your conference as an indication of my personal support of your organization and its purposes, as well as an expression of my interest in your Convention theme: "Decade of Service in Depth."

I believe deeply in true professionalism and training for rehabilitation personnel. RSA has been heavily involved for many years in strengthening the professional community which serves deaf people and in encouraging the voluntary sector to expand and intensify its activities in this area. The Professional Rehabilitation Workers with the Adult Deaf, in the few short years of its existence, has proven to be an invaluable forum for an exchange of ideas and experience for all the disciplines concerned with the welfare and rehabilitation of deaf people. You fill a critical gap in the structure of voluntary and professional organizations in the field. As for your Convention theme: What we all want--and I am speaking of the Federal agency, rehabilitation workers in the public and voluntary sectors, this professional association--is the improvement of services to deaf people including vocational rehabilitation services. Such services to date have all too frequently been more "tokenism" than service in depth. There are too many deaf people who have not been helped to function at levels that reflect their true capabilities.

I am aware that deafness is one of the most complex as well as the most frustrating of disabilities. A great many handicaps, often subtle ones, stem from it and, as a result, even expert vocational

rehabilitation counselors who are untrained or inexperienced in deafness may founder seriously in trying to serve deaf clients. Despite such deficiencies in providing rehabilitation services, the rise in the number of deaf people rehabilitated over the past decade has exceeded the overall rate of growth. In 1960, for example, only 1,617 deaf people were rehabilitated in the State-Federal program, compared with 5,598 in 1969, or a growth factor of 4.5, while the total number of rehabilitations less than trebled during the same period, from 88,275 in 1960 to 241,390 in 1969.

I do not mean, by citing these figures, to say that we are even beginning to address ourselves to the total number of deaf people who can benefit from rehabilitation, but these numbers indicate the special interest which the rehabilitation agency has shown in the deaf since Mary Switzer headed the program. That special interest continues, and it manifests itself in a way which I am sure will be of interest to all professional workers in the field. Despite significant cutbacks in funds for training in recent years, a special effort has been made to see to it that grants in the area of training related to the deaf have not been slashed, for example. As a matter of fact, the \$660,000 spent in Fiscal 1970 for long and short-term training projects in this area represented a slight increase over the previous year, while other areas were being cut back extensively.

I know from my own experience as director of Statewide Planning in Massachusetts, that the problem of deafness will not go away by itself. I remember clearly the hearings we conducted into the impact of the rubella epidemic on the education and service delivery systems. Children with hearing impairments were being phased into a public school system which was woefully unprepared to serve them. And they had received little if any pre-school training as 2-3-4 year olds; training from which they would have benefited tremendously---such as training in normal speech and oral conversation which are basic to reading, social, and intellectual skills necessary for a productive, happy adult life.

I am sure that PRWAD will also play an important role in seeing to it that our rehabilitation program continues to do more for deaf people. You must continue to concern yourself with every aspect of diagnosis, evaluation, adjustment, vocational training,

and placement. I think it fair to say that the quality and quantity of services in each of these categories will be very largely influenced by your effectiveness. In only three years, you have grown to nearly 1,000 members; evidence that many professional workers have been seeking the kind of forum you provide. And one of the cornerstones of the rehabilitation program has been the flexibility of the program, and its willingness to heed the voices and opinions of those on the community and service-delivery levels. This is a role which your organization can play effectively.

We need your guidance in identifying the areas which need study and projects which will improve the social and economic circumstances of deaf people. We need your help in recruiting more people for serving deaf people, and in stimulating more professional training programs. The coming decade will be an exciting and challenging one for all of us in the rehabilitation movement. We will have an opportunity to extend the benefits of the rehabilitation process to an ever-larger number of handicapped people. But, we must make sure that, while we are widening the impact of our program we see to it that we also deepen our effectiveness and the quality of our services and we must recognize that consumer involvement will be a fact of life in public programs in the Seventies. The pressure will be on from below, as well as from above, to deal with these rising expectations. Your Convention theme: "Deafness in the Seventies: A Decade of Service in Depth" reflects your own awareness of these important issues.

President Lauritsen, I thank you for the opportunity of speaking here today and of extending to you my own personal best wishes for continued growth and achievement.